Issue 4

$5.00

TAMARACK MAGAZINE

EXPLORATION OF VALLEY HISTORY

Introduction

"One of the most valuable lessons we learned from Mr. Blimke's example is that hard work pays off."

This fourth issue of TAMARACK magazine is a result of the labour of twenty grade eleven students, and I really believe that the hard work has paid off. We have enjoyed watching the magazine take shape as it has evolved from taped interviews to the final product that you see here. As the students were interviewing Mr. Blimke and the other subjects of this magazine, they were learning invaluable lessons in life as well as some local Valley history.

TAMARACK is a program that allows students to learn through experience. A group of senior students spend one semester with one teacher. As well as producing this magazine, the students participate in four wilderness trips, complete a work experience with scientists and do extensive environmental work. The school is used as a base, but the community and the wilderness are important classrooms in addition to the traditional one.

This program was designed and first implemented by Bill Patterson. Bill retired from Mackenzie High School in June of 1995 after delivering TAMARACK three times. I was lucky enough to inherit this integrated course from him. Bill continues to actively support TAMARACK in many ways — we appreciate his guidance and mentorship and would like to dedicate this issue to him.

John Steer
April, 1996

In Memoriam

We would like to pay tribute to Mr. Vern Cournoyer, whom we interviewed for our last issue of TAMARACK Magazine and who has since passed away.

"Of course in them days when you turned fourteen you were supposed to be a man."

Mr. Allan Blimke

The Laurentian View Dairy is known all over the Ottawa Valley for its ice cream and its 'good old fashioned home cookin''. As we walked to Mr. Blimke's house, we wondered what the man who had founded this well-known establishment would be like. We would soon find out. When we reached the red brick house beside the Laurentian View Dairy, we met his daughter, Vera, outside. She took a break from shoveling snow and guided us into the house. Vera took our jackets and we went to the living room to set up. Mr. Blimke was reading the morning newspaper. Once we got started, Mr. Blimke was excited and had no problem telling us stories of his past. We soon found out that his life had been filled with many more adventures than we had ever expected.

by Dwayne Donnelly and Elizabeth Payer

"Times when I was a child aren't like they are today. I was nine years old when we moved up to Perch Lake from Pembroke. We lived on a farm and had a big family with eleven at home. The only schooling I got was from age six to nine. When we moved up here, the school was a little log house on the old Pembroke and Mattawa road, down at what they call the Nadeau place. We lived about three miles from there. In the summer time there was school and in the winter time the roads were closed. There was no snowplows then and you had to make your own path. The only snowshoes we had then were boards with a strap across the middle and we'd try to walk on them. During the summer I didn't get too much schooling because I was next on the list for working around the farm. I was eleven or twelve and of course nobody pushed me to go to school and I didn't fight to go. We used to go swimming a lot in the summer time, in the Indian River and that was a big deal. An odd time we'd club together five or six boys and go together and fish along the river. We didn't always have shoes to wear and in the summer time we'd run bare feet. Of course when we went to school we had a pair of boots on. In those days there was plenty of work but the money was scarce, so we all had to wear the give downs.

In those days there was plenty of work but the money was scarce.

My father was a sawyer at the Pembroke Lumber Company mill and he worked there for eighteen years. My mother, she was the housekeeper and that's about it. She was a good cook and a good baker. We always had lots to eat but we didn't have too many cakes or pies and things like that. I used to remember on Sundays she'd have a layer cake with a little thin icing on top baked for us, and we always looked forward to that. It used to taste pretty good.

I worked a lot on the farm 'till I got married. I did the regular farm duties of course, but there was no modern equipment. It was all hand work with a fork or a hoe or a shovel. We didn't have a binder at that time either. My father had to cut the grain with a thing called a cradle and I would come along and make a sheaf. Then we would take the sheaves and lean them up to dry.

About all that was going on in those days was cutting wood and logs.

When I was a teenager in Chalk River there wasn't too many families. We more or less socialized among the boys. Of course, sometimes we'd make up a ball team and play ball on Sunday afternoon. There would be some girls around then but the teams were always just for men. In the fall we used to have turkeys or geese or something that you would raise on the farm, and we would raffle them off. Any time there was a raffle there was a dance. Oh yes, we used to dance a lot and we'd shoot dice and the highest one would get a turkey.

Of course in them days when you were fourteen you were supposed to be a man. You got away from the family because it was always too big and you started to go out working for yourself. But you brought your money back home, pretty much. Now, my first job was just across from my cottage up at Point Alexander. I worked at the Fraser Depot, which was a log camp about three miles from my cottage. Of course there was more than one lumber camp. There was about three there at that time. And in those camps there was over about one hundred and fifty men. About all that was going on in those days was cutting wood and logs.

A passenger boat was running from Pembroke to the Swisha [Rapides des Joachims] at that time. I remember getting on that boat in the evening at Balmer's Bay. The boat landed on the Ontario side and went across the river to the Quebec side. I had a little old potato bag with a few clothes in it, that was the go at that time. I had that over my shoulder and a man looked at me and asked where I was going. I told him I was going into Jack Zadow's camp and I'd be cuttin' trails. Of course I was used to that down on the farm. I could cut trails and I could drive horses too. He just looked at me and told me to get a few blankets to spend the night.

You could hear the echo on the sides of the hills when it was cold or quiet.

He didn't think I could make it in before dark. I was anxious to get in there though; my brother

was already working in there with a couple of other boys from around Deep River. I said I was going, so away I went. I was really running and all at once I went around a sharp curve and the lights were there. I was really glad of that. When I got there the men were just eating. I knew where the cook house was — I could see it, so I walked in. Everybody turned their heads and looked at me. I went in and I asked Jack Zadow for a job and he said he'd give me a try. So I got a place at the table and sat down and had my supper. Then I went to the office and got some blankets, and then I went to my bunk. I remember when the cook would start calling you early in the morning. It would be dark of course and he would blow through this horn. You could hear the echo on the sides of the hills when it was cold or quiet.

I got married in 1927. She was a local girl living at Point Alexander. Her father was a section foreman for the C.P.R. at Bass Lake. He was a big [important] man but a good man. I had to work for the C.P.R. because nobody could get along without working for them. After my wife's brother got killed at Bass Lake on a motor car, work didn't the seem the same there. A man from the Dominion Forestry in Chalk River came over one day and he asked me if I'd like to work for the Forestry. I had the experience of forestry work, building roads and cutting trees — that's why they

The Chalk River Dairy

asked me to go out there. He told me he had a job, a boss job. So I said 'Alright, I'll try.' I lived in Chalk River but I went to Petawawa every day. I had around twenty men there. It was all bush work, cleaning and so on. When that job was finished he wanted me to stay on the headquarters at Chalk River. I kept on there as a labourer and I worked there seven and a half years. I was about thirty seven or thirty eight years of age at that time.

After about three, four days they'd had enough of the bush and flies and they were glad to give themselves up.

When I worked at the Forestry, I was in charge of the prison camp out at Centre Lake. They supplied me with a truck from headquarters, to go to and from the prison camp every day. We done a lot of work out there. I supplied all that camp with wood and that was a big chore. Then we cleaned the hydro line from the Barron River to Deep River. The trees all fell over and I cleaned those with the prisoners. And if there was roads to be built, I'd build roads.

While I was at Centre Lake with the prisoners, there was three escapees. They had soldiers and they looked after the prisoners. You'd turn around while you were in the bush and the prisoners would slip away.

I remember one escape in particular. We were brushing in a flat spot where the creek was

coming into the lake. There was a German officer (a prisoner of war) with me and he could speak English good and plain, he was boss over those fellas. I noticed something queer and I said to him, 'I thought I had six of those guys there, where's the other three?' He said he'd go see. So he come back and he said they weren't there. When that happens everything is shut down and everybody goes inside. They put their guards in all the different places until they find the prisoners. Each escapee was caught at Petawawa. Of course, the escapee would follow the Petawawa River not knowin' where it's going, the military would just sit back and wait for them to come. After about three, four days they'd had enough of the bush and the flies and they were glad to give themselves up.

In 1945 the first dairy burned down.

Of course, in them days there was no pasteurized milk around here. We had a cow and every once in a while somebody wanted to buy some milk. My wife, she used to strain the milk and put it up in little pails. The boys were startin' to grow and when they could carry a pail of milk, they had a job. So that's the way we started. People would run short of milk, especially in the fall of the year because the cow's flow would go down. Well, then they'd go over to Blimke's for a quart of milk. When I'd run short, I'd buy another cow and when I started the dairy I had fifteen or sixteen cows in all.

The first dairy was in Chalk River. I owned ten acres of land that I bought from Mrs. Boyle for three hundred and twenty five dollars, at ten dollars a month. In '44, I decided to put in the pasteurization. We were not equipped like today. Now we have all kinds of milk. When I opened the first dairy, I didn't have any trucks. I used to deliver out of the back of my car. Then I got up to about two hundred quarts a day and I had to buy trucks. In 1945 the first dairy burned down. Well, the fire was an awful mess; oh boy! It got started from a faulty chimney. It started burning on the roof and the lads inside didn't know.

When I decided to rebuild here in Deep River it was all bush. One man showed me that Ridge Road would be coming out to the Number 17 Highway. So that's how I come to pick this place — it was a good spot. So then it started to creep up; business started to get better all of the time. Of course

The Laurentian View Dairy, a Deep River landmark.

that dairy wasn't as big as it is now. I'd say it was about half the size.

To tell ya the truth, we were makin' more profit then than we are now, I mean percentage wise. In those days the milk was selling at twenty five cents a quart. The stores didn't handle milk, only just for emergency sake but now that's changed.

In those days we had to deliver it from door to door. We got out of delivering the milk about four years ago. Actually, it made less work for us. It was a big job goin' around collecting and marking everything down in the books. Of course, you had milk tickets, but sometimes you'd run out of them too. Milk tickets would come in sheets, about twenty to a sheet and it said, 'Good for one quart of milk.' You'd put that in your empty bottle, and you'd leave it. In the winter time it was a little difficult because if there was a little moisture left in the bottle and you set the bottle outside, that ticket would be frozen and you couldn't take it out. You'd have to bring the bottle inside and thaw it out to get that ticket. So it made less work for us by the way it is now.

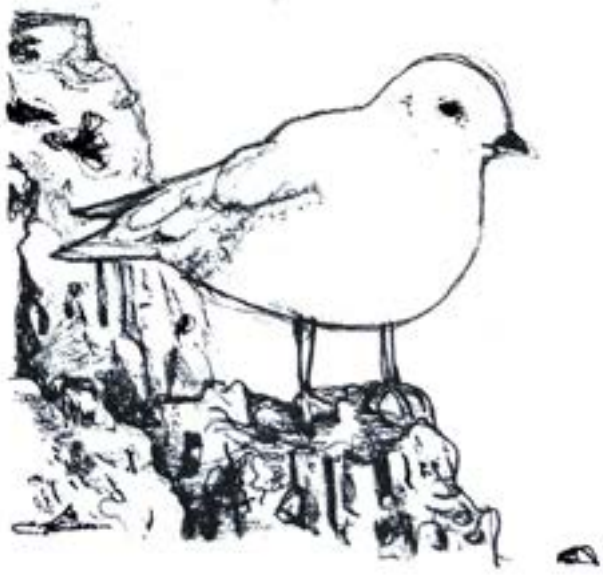
The second fire was in 1985. The fire started under the roof and it burnt all the way right back from one end to the other. The inspector was here for four days and he couldn't find where the fire had started. All the controls were workin' so he decided to go up in the attic again and take another look. He was up there about twenty minutes and he come down and he said, 'I have it, the wires were leaning on a piece of timber and either a squirrel or a chipmunk peeled the insulation off of them and that's where the fire started. You must have been using excessive electricity.' The insurance people were good though. I can't complain about what the dairy was insured for. The insurance money gave me a good start, but I had to borrow $250 000 dollars along with it. When I rebuilt, I put in more new equipment. There was no use starting over again with old equipment. Everything seemed to go really good after that.

It was nothing to get up at three o'clock in the morning to start off, that's just the dairy.

Over the years I can't say business has been anything but favourable. All along right from the time I started right up 'till today. There are a lot of benefits too — the boys, they all had jobs. I can't say anything different because it was all pretty good to me. I had good health, I was strong enough to work and I didn't mind it. It was nothing to get up at three o'clock in the morning to start off, that's just the dairy. There was lots of hard hours. I used to get up early and start the pasteurizing first before I'd go out on the road. There were times that I sat down and fell asleep too.

The dairy was a hard go. A dairy job is not easy, there is lots of work. I seemed to like the work. I was wantin' to start a business, you know, I had that kind of feeling. So that's how I kept on going. Oh ya, I worked hard all my life."

After talking with Mr. Blimke, we discovered how rich and full his life was. Through his stories we came to appreciate the history of the Deep River area. We hope some day to have as much success and adventure in life as he did. One of the most valuable lessons we learned from Mr. Blimke's example is that hard work pays off.



Acknowledgments

The success of the TAMARACK program has been directly related to the enthusiastic participation and assistance of many people. The TAMARACK class would like to thank:

- Bill Patterson, for providing strong support throughout the semester.
- Carl Hoelke, Charlotte McWilliam, Lori Moeck and Dean Hilts, for accompanying us on our outings.
- Art Van Winckle, Tim Schutt, Doug Moon, Donna Corning and Ivan Saari, for allowing us access to computer facilities.
- Gordon Ramsey, for making arrangements for our winter outing at Fort Pine.
- Jim Murphy, for providing us with access to photography equipment.
- The staff at AECL's Chalk River Laboratories and Ima Kalos of Public Affairs for providing us with valuable work experience.
- Mary Fehrenbach, for her enthusiastic support of the program.
- Don Dodds and the staff of DFR Printing for their encouragement and technical support.
- Craig Lance and the Mackenzie custodial staff, for their consistent cooperation and patience.
- Dave Lee, Dave Harris, Jill Mark, Lori Moeck, Grace Junop and Janice Farhood, for coming in and speaking to us.
- Parents of TAMARACK students, without whom the program wouldn't be possible. They help us in every way possible.
- Canadian Forces Base Petawawa for allowing us to use Fort Pine.
- TAMARACK alumni, for assisting us with editing.
- *The North Renfrew Times*, for allowing us to use historical photographs.
- Jill Foster, CEO of the W.B. Lewis Library for her kind donations.
- The citizens of the Valley, for supporting our fundraising endeavours.

The following businesses support the program by selling copies of TAMARACK Magazine. We appreciate their contribution.

- The Loon's Nest
- New Idea Store
- Valley Artisan's Co-op
- Snider's Pharmacy
- Checkers Restaurant
- Log House Antiques
- Fraser's Clothes Shops (Renfrew)

Thank You

TAMARACK would like to thank the following individuals, organizations and businesses for their financial support of our program:

Knights of Columbus, Deep River

Petawawa Rotary Club

Valley Savings

Dave Thompson

Checkers Café

Dr. Mike Van Tomme

Darlene Patterson

Scouts Canada, First Deep River

Fleury's Valu-mart

Chalk River Shell and Motel

Copies of TAMARACK Magazine may be purchased at various retailers in the Valley or directly from the school.

Each issue costs $5.00 + $1.00 handling.

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